

# Entertainment

Keely Wygonik editor/953-2105



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(O7B)

## Vampire tale

### Skillful cast brings Dracula to life

Performances of the St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook production of "Count Dracula" continue through Nov. 2 at the playhouse, 400 Lone Pine Road in Bloomfield Hills. For ticket information, call 644-0527.

With the Halloween season here, "Count Dracula" once again menaces the area as St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook presents a handsome, stylish version of the popular vampire tale. The skillful cast does a good job of bringing the creepy old story to life, creating almost believable characters trapped in a nightmare of fear.

The Ted Tiller dramatization from the classic Bram Stoker novel is set in England in the 1930s. Dr. Seward (Michael Shulman), the director of a private insane asylum, has his hands more than full. He must cope with Sybil (Rox Basherian), his addle-brained sister; Renfield (Brian Dooley), an inmate constantly escaping; Mina (Laura Raisch), his young fiancée, suddenly suffering unexplainable bouts of weakness; and Count Dracula (Paul Gillin), the intrusive new neighbor who has moved into the castle across the valley.

THE PRODUCTION has its share of blood-curdling screams, eerie special effects, and dramatically chil-



**Barbara Michals**

ing music. Despite the best efforts of director Amy Lynn Smith and her cast, a small percentage of lines still sound hopelessly silly. It makes little, as horror stories such as "Dracula" are today more for fun than for thrills, and last Friday's opening night audience willingly played along.

On the other hand, this adaptation of the Dracula legend has many lines ripe with dramatic irony that do not get the maximum benefit of good comic timing.

Gillin's Count Dracula is pleasingly suave and debonair in the beginning, gradually allowing his true pernicious character to show through until he reveals the blood-thirsty, fanged vampire contemptuous of all who try to thwart him. Gillin nicely combines his arrogance with early hints of mischievous humor in his face. His makeup is refreshingly understated.

Dooley pulls out all the stops as the insane Renfield whether wring-

**The production has its share of blood-curdling screams, eerie special effects and dramatically chilling music.**

ing his hands and cowering in terror at the awesome power of Dracula or reveling in his own penchant for swallowing flies and spiders. The physical fights are well-staged as Renfield grapples convincingly with Jonathan (Christopher Kelly), Mina's very earnest fiancée, and Hennessey (Tom Christopher), Dr. Seward's loyal attendant.

Raisch is excellent at making Mina more than just a Pretty Young Thing. She very effectively conveys Mina's confusion and overwhelming fear, and she nicely slides in and out of playing the seductive mix Mina becomes when the vampires' influence takes hold.



Count Dracula (Paul Gillin) and Mina (Laura Raisch) in a scene from "Count Dracula" presented by the St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook.

AS SYBIL, Basherian is amusingly befuddled, quite batty without any help from Dracula. Though her first few lines lacked clarity because they were too high-pitched, she quickly warmed to the role and endeared herself to the audience.

Shulman's Dr. Seward always

seems appropriately in control as he struggles to keep Dracula out and Renfield in. As Jonathan, Kelly is full of sincerity and determination, as is Topper Pennington's Dr. Helsing, the kindly old family friend who is an expert on vampires and leads the plot to foil Dracula's evil intentions.

Bob Raisch's very handsome Gothic set establishes the tone for this stylish production, matched by Cathine Gianakura and Marian McMechan's costume designs. A few technical glitches on opening night were only minor flaws.

## Actresses team up in 'Candide'

By Mary Jane Doerr  
special writer

The governmental climate in Michigan these days is not nurturing for the arts, but singer/actress/director Chris Jones' career is flourishing. So is actress Rochelle Rosenthal's, and both Birmingham residents love it.

Jones has three shows in production — a children's piece she wrote "Let's Play Mozart" currently being toured by Michigan Opera Theatre Community Programs, a play, "Nunsense," she directed at the Marquis Theatre in Northville, and the musical "Candide" she is assisting, which opens this Friday at the Fisher Theatre in Detroit. For ticket information, call 874-SING.

"DETROIT HAS been good to me," said Jones over a light dinner between rehearsals of "Candide" at the Michigan Opera Theatre.

Rosenthal, who does a lot of commercial work, and industrial films, echoes her satisfaction. "It is a major, major treat for me to be in this production. It is grueling, sweaty, hot and I look at it as an opportunity to lose some weight."

This is Jones' third show as an assistant director for MOT. Last year, she was the associate director of the



**Chris Jones is assistant director at Michigan Opera Theatre.**

Community Program's tour of "La Traviata" and the assistant director of "Ariadne on Naxos" and "Madame Butterfly."

"IT IS a great opportunity to work with Dorothy Danner," said Jones whose responsibility as assistant director is to take scenes out and work with the actors shaping the action according to director Danner's ideas. When Danner leaves after opening night, Jones will attend all performances to keep the staging within Danner's intentions.

"Chris and I have known each other for at least 10 years, and it is wonderful being able to work with her again," said Rosenthal who has the major part of the Old Lady in this production of "Candide." This is Rosenthal's first show with MOT since 1987 when she was in "Man of



**Rochelle Rosenthal appears in "Candide" at the Fisher Theatre.**

La Mancha." Before that she was in "Swansea Todd" and the "The Mikado."

BOTH THESPIANS are excited about this production of "Candide" because the recent recording with Jerry Hadley has created a renewal of interest in Leonard Bernstein's musical, and because Dorothy Danner and conductor Mitchell Kriger have created a newly reworked production of the show.

They both feel it is more effective than the versions of the New York City Opera, Lillian Hellman, Hal Prince, and numerous others. The story is based on Voltaire's 1756 comedy.

"I think the payoff is going to be when the audiences see what a great cast this is, and what a wonderful production it is," said Jones.

## 'The Wiz' pleasing entertainment

Performances of the Bloomfield Players production of "The Wiz" continue through Nov. 3 at the Lahser High School theater, 3436 Lahser Road, Bloomfield Hills. For ticket information, call 433-6885.

Whimsically wonderful costumes in electric colors come close to running away with the show in Bloomfield Players' lively production of "The Wiz." Appropriately, only Aunt Em and Uncle Henry wear bland clothes.

Once Dorothy hits Oz, color explodes. Check out the place names. The Yellow Brick Road weaves through the cartoon countryside and leads, as any savvy kid knows, to the fabled Emerald City. In Oz color is supposed to rule. In the Bloomfield Players production, it triumphs.

JULIANNE J. Schmidt, who doubles as director and costume designer, creates a visual kaleidoscope in this jivey musical modernization of the classic Frank Baum story The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. With full orchestra led by Valerie



**Cathie Breidenbach**

Palmeri, and a cast and crew of more than 80 people, Schmidt keeps the pacing lively.

Players dressed as tornadoes, munchkins, a yellow brick road, scarecrows, coppers, monkeys, Winkles, and Oozes enter and exit, dance and parade in a celebration that's almost non-stop. Except for the solos. The joyous whirl abruptly halts for the mostly forgettable solo tunes. The music in this update succeeds in being upbeat and different but in no way better than the original songs Judy Garland and her cohorts sang in the immortal movie musical.

Combine forgettable songs with a sound system that crackles and fades making some vocals impossible to hear, and solos drag like a

long grace before dinner. With its otherwise live-wire pacing, enthusiastic cast, and fine dancing, The Wiz provides pleasing entertainment in a show kids will love.

Laura Rogers, who plays Dorothy, has a lovely voice, but could use a bit of the Tinman's oil to loosen her up when she sings. Not so Richard Tripp who plays the lanky Scarecrow with such a liquid motion that rubber bands of bungees must hold him together at knees and elbows. Larry Miller, as the cowardly lion postures like a portly pussycat who's pretending to be a mean, sleek predator, despite his own tail.

FOR SHEER exuberant charisma, check out Alana Simon as Adäpärle, the witch with green glittering hair. And for the girl in red satin, the house-sized witch, Evillene (Donna Kussad) brings to mind the wicked Java the Hutt.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.

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